

NSC BRIEFING**19 May 1966****DEVELOPMENTS IN LAOS**

1. The government of Laos, which has adhered to a generally pro-Western policy, may now be on the verge of adopting a neutral position as the price necessary for termination of two-year-long Communist domination of the two mountainous northern provinces.
2. The Lao-tian Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, has indicated that he is determined to meet with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet Lao, in the hope of settling "mutual problems." Souvanna is under strong pressure from other government leaders to obtain a settlement. Although he has professed no intention to deal firmly with the Pathets, the American embassy in Vientiane has warned that the Premier is naive and might easily "give something away without meaning to."
3. Such a meeting, which is now scheduled for 20 June, has long been advocated both by the Communists and by the Indian chairman of the International Trade Commission, who has been working overtime to arrange it. Hanoi, Peking and Moscow have all taken the line that the time is propitious for a settlement in Laos.
4. The Communists apparently feel that there is much more to be gained now by "peaceful" methods than by continuing the increasingly rewarding military effort in the disputed provinces.

25X1

25X1

25X1

a. They have hinted that the Laotian government's authority over the provinces could be restored in return for a pledge of strict neutrality and satisfactory "reintegration" of Pathet Lao personnel into Laotian society (i.e. some into the army, some into the civil service, plus recognition of the Pathets as a legal political party).

b. At a meeting between top Viet Cong leaders and the truce committee in Hanoi last weekend--arranged by the Indians--all the Communist participants stressed how well things were going in Cambodia and indicated that if a similar "climate" prevailed in Laos the problem of that nation's disputed mountain provinces could be easily worked out.

c. Although Premier Souvanna has always sought to assure us that he will be dealing from a position of strength in any negotiations with the Pathets, there is considerable evidence [redacted] that he is tempted by such Communist proposals. In a 10 May interview with the London Daily Worker's notorious Wilfred Burchett--also arranged by the Indians--the premier stated that if government control of the north were restored, he was prepared to reintegrate the Pathets into both the government and the armed forces "without discrimination" and that Laos would subscribe to the "five principles of coexistence."

Page Denied